ON THE CHURCH AND STATE IN FRANCE

AU MILIEU DES SOLLICITUDES

Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII promulgated on February 16, 1892.

To Our Venerable Brothers the Archbishops, Bishops, Clergy and Faithful of France.

To the Bishops and Faithful of France,

Amid the cares of the universal Church We have many times, in the course of Our Pontificate, been pleased to testify Our affection for France and her noble people, and in one of Our Encyclicals, still within the memory of all, We endeavored solemnly to express the innermost feelings of Our soul on this subject. It is precisely this affection that has caused Us to watch with deep interest and then to revolve in Our mind the succession of events, sometimes sad, sometimes consoling, which, of late years, has taken place in your midst.

2. Again, at present, when contemplating the depths of the vast conspiracy that certain men have formed for the annihilation of Christianity in France and the animosity with which they pursue the realization of their design, trampling under foot the most elementary notions of liberty and justice for the sentiment of the greater part of the nation, and of respect for the inalienable rights of the Catholic Church, how can We but be stricken with deepest grief? And when We behold, one after another, the dire consequences of these sinful attacks which conspire to ruin morals, religion, and even political interests, wisely understood, how express the bitterness that overwhelms Us and the apprehensions that beset Us?

3. On the other hand, We feel greatly consoled when We see this same French people increasing its zeal and affection for the Holy See in proportion as that See is abandoned--We should rather say warred with upon earth. Moved by deeply religious and patriotic sentiments, representatives of all the social classes have repeatedly come to Us from France, happy to aid the Church in her incessant needs and eager to ask us for light and counsel, so as to be sure that amid present tribulations they would in nowise deviate from the teachings of the Head of the Faithful. And We, in Our turn, either in writing or by word of mouth, have openly told Our sons what they had a right to demand of their Father, and, far from discouraging them, we have strongly exhorted them to increase their love and efforts in defense of the Catholic faith and likewise of their native land: two duties of paramount importance, and from which, in this life, no man can exempt himself.

4. Now We deem it opportune, nay, even necessary, once again to raise Our voice entreating still more earnestly, We shall not say Catholics only, but all upright and intelligent Frenchmen, utterly to disregard all germs of political strife in order to devote their efforts solely to the pacification of their country. All understand the value of this pacification; all continue to desire it more and more. And We who crave it more than any one, since We represent on earth the God of peace, urge by these present Letters all righteous souls, all generous hearts, to assist Us in making it stable and fruitful.

5. First of all, let us take as a starting-point a well-known truth

admitted by all men of good sense and loudly proclaimed by the history of all peoples; namely, that religion, and religion only, can create the social bond; that it alone maintains the peace of a nation on a solid foundation. When different families, without giving up the rights and duties of domestic society, unite under the inspiration of nature, in order to constitute themselves members of another larger family circle called civil society, their object is not only to find therein the means of providing for their material welfare, but, above all, to draw thence the boon of moral improvement. Otherwise society would rise but little above the level of an aggregation of beings devoid of reason, and whose whole life would consist in the satisfaction of sensual instincts. Moreover, without this moral improvement it would be difficult to demonstrate that civil society was an advantage rather than a detriment to man, as man.

6. Now, morality, in man, by the mere fact that it should establish harmony among so many dissimilar rights and duties, since it enters as an element into every human act, necessarily supposes God, and with God, religion, that sacred bond whose privilege is to unite, anteriorly to all other bonds, man to God. Indeed, the idea of morality signifies, above all, an order of dependence in regard to truth which is the light of the mind; in regard to good which is the object of the will; and without truth and good there is no morality worthy of the name. And what is the principal and essential truth, that from which all truth is derived? It is God. What, therefore, is the supreme good from which all other good proceeds? God. Finally, who is the creator and guardian of our reason, our will, our whole being, as well as the end of our life? God; always God. Since, therefore, religion is the interior and exterior expression of the dependence which, in justice, we owe to God. there follows a grave obligation. All citizens are bound to unite in maintaining in the nation true religious sentiment, and to defend it in case of need, if ever, despite the protestations of nature and of history, an atheistical school should set about banishing God from society, thereby surely annihilating the moral sense even in the depths of the human conscience. Among men who have not lost all notion of integrity there can exist no difference of opinion on this point.

7. In French Catholics the religious sentiment should be even deeper and more universal because they have the happiness of belonging to the true religion. If, indeed, religious beliefs were, always and everywhere, given as a basis of the morality of human actions and the existence of all well-ordained society, it is evident that the Catholic religion, by the mere fact that it is the true Church of Jesus Christ, possesses, more than any other, the efficacy required for the regulation of life in society and in the individual. Would you have a brilliant example of this? France herself furnishes the same.... In proportion as France progressed in the Christian faith she was seen to rise gradually to the moral greatness which she attained as a political and military power. To the natural generosity of her heart Christian charity came and added an abundant source of new energy; her wonderful activity received still greater impetus from contact with the light that guides and is the pledge of constancy, the Christian faith, which, by the hand of France, traced such glorious pages in the history of mankind. And even to-day does not her faith continue to add new glories to those of the past? We behold France, inexhaustible in her genius and resources, multiplying works of charity at home; we admire her enterprises in foreign lands where, by means of her gold and the labors of her missionaries who work even at the price of their blood, she simultaneously propagates her own renown and the benefits of the Catholic

religion. No Frenchman, whatever his convictions in other respects, would dare to renounce glory such as this, for to do so would be to deny his native land.

8. Now the history of a nation reveals in an incontestable way the generating and preserving element of its moral greatness, and should this element ever be missing, neither a superabundance of gold nor even force of arms could save it from moral decadence and perhaps death. Who then but understands that for all Frenchmen professing the Catholic religion the great anxiety should be to insure its preservation, and that with all the more devotedness since in their midst the sects are making Christianity an object of implacable hostility. Therefore, on this ground, they can afford neither indolence of action nor party divisions; the one would bespeak cowardice unworthy of a Christian, the other would bring about disastrous weakness.

9. And now, before going any further, We must indicate a craftily circulated calumny making most odious imputations against Catholics, and even against the Holy See itself. It is maintained that that vigor of action inculcated in Catholics for the defense of their faith has for a secret motive much less the safeguarding of their religious interests than the ambition of securing to the Church political domination over the State. Truly this is the revival of a very ancient calumny, as its invention belongs to the first enemies of Christianity. Was it not first of all formulated against the adorable person of the Redeemer? Yes, when He illuminated souls by His preaching and alleviated the corporal or spiritual sufferings of the unfortunate with the treasures of His divine bounty, he was accused of having political ends in view. "We have found this man perverting our nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he is Christ, the king[1]. If thou release this man, thou are not Caesar's friend. For whomsoever maketh himself a king, speaketh against Caesar.... We have no king but Caesar."[2]

10. It was these threatening calumnies which drew from Pilate the sentence of death against Him whom he had repeatedly declared innocent. And the authors of these lies, or of others of equal strength, omitted nothing that would aid their emissaries in propagating them far and wide; and thus did St. Justin, martyr, rebuke the Jews of his time: "Far from repenting when you had learned of His resurrection from the dead, you sent to Jerusalem shrewdly chosen men to announce that a heresy and an impious sect had been started by a certain seducer called Jesus of Galilee."[3]

11. In so audaciously defaming Christianity its enemies know well what they did; their plan was to raise against its propagation a formidable adversary, the Roman Empire. The calumny made headway; and in their credulity the pagans called the first Christians "useless creatures, dangerous citizens, factionists, enemies of the Empire and the Emperors."[4] But in vain did the apologists of Christianity by their writings, and Christians by their splendid conduct, endeavor to demonstrate the absurdity and criminality of these qualifications: they were not heeded. Their very name was equivalent to a declaration of war; and Christians, by the mere fact of their being such, and for no other reason, were forced to choose between apostasy and martyrdom, being allowed no alternative. During the following centuries the same grievances and the same severity prevailed to a greater or less extent, whenever governments were unreasonably jealous of their power and maliciously disposed against the Church. They never failed

to call public attention to the pretended encroachment of the Church upon the State, in order to furnish the State with some apparent right to violently attack the Catholic religion.

12. We have expressly recalled some features of the past that Catholics might not be dismayed by the present. Substantially the struggle is ever the same: Jesus Christ is always exposed to the contradictions of the world, and the same means are always used by modern enemies of Christianity, means old in principle and scarcely modified in form; but the same means of defense are also clearly indicated to Christians of the present day by our apologists, our doctors and our martyrs. What they have done it is incumbent upon us to do in our turn. Let us therefore place above all else the glory of God and of His Church; let us work for her with an assiduity at once constant and effective, and leave all care of success to Jesus Christ, who tells us: "In the world you shall have distress: but have confidence, I have overcome the world."[5]

13. To attain this We have already remarked that a great union is necessary, and if it is to be realized, it is indispensable that all preoccupation capable of diminishing its strength and efficacy must be abandoned. Here We intend alluding principally to the political differences among the French in regard to the actual republic--a question We would treat with the clearness which the gravity of the subject demands, beginning with the principles and descending thence to practical results.

14. Various political governments have succeeded one another in France during the last century, each having its own distinctive form: the Empire, the Monarchy, and the Republic. By giving one's self up to abstractions, one could at length conclude which is the best of these forms, considered in themselves; and in all truth it may be affirmed that each of them is good, provided it lead straight to its end--that is to say, to the common good for which social authority is constituted; and finally, it may be added that, from a relative point of view, such and such a form of government may be preferable because of being better adapted to the character and customs of such or such a nation. In this order of speculative ideas, Catholics, like all other citizens, are free to prefer one form of government to another precisely because no one of these social forms is, in itself, opposed to the principles of sound reason nor to the maxims of Christian doctrine. What amply justifies the wisdom of the Church is that in her relations with political powers she makes abstraction of the forms which differentiate them and treats with them concerning the great religious interests of nations, knowing that hers is the duty to undertake their tutelage above all other interests. Our preceding Encyclicals have already exposed these principles, but it was nevertheless necessary to recall them for the development of the subject which occupies us to-day.

15. In descending from the domain of abstractions to that of facts, we must beware of denying the principles just established: they remain fixed. However, becoming incarnated in facts, they are clothed with a contingent character, determined by the center in which their application is produced. Otherwise said, if every political form is good by itself and may be applied to the government of nations, the fact still remains that political power is not found in all nations under the same form; each has its own. This form springs from a combination of historical or national, though always human, circumstances which, in a nation, give rise to its traditional and even fundamental laws, and by these is determined the

particular form of government, the basis of transmission of supreme power.

16. It were useless to recall that all individuals are bound to accept these governments and not to attempt their overthrow or a change in their form. Hence it is that the Church, the guardian of the truest and highest idea of political sovereignty, since she has derived it from God, has always condemned men who rebelled against legitimate authority and disapproved their doctrines. And that too at the very time when the custodians of power used it against her, thereby depriving themselves of the strongest support given their authority and of efficacious means of obtaining from the people obedience to their laws. And apropos of this subject, We cannot lay too great stress upon the precepts given to the first Christians by the Prince of the apostles in the midst of persecutions: "Honor all men: love the brotherhood: fear God: honor the king";[6] and those of St. Paul: "I desire, therefore, first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men: For kings and for all who are in high station, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, in all piety and chastity. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God, our Savior."[7]

17. However, here it must be carefully observed that whatever be the form of civil power in a nation, it cannot be considered so definitive as to have the right to remain immutable, even though such were the intention of those who, in the beginning, determined it.... Only the Church of Jesus Christ has been able to preserve, and surely will preserve unto the consummation of time, her form of government. Founded by Him who was, who is, and who will be forever,[8] she has received from Him, since her very origin, all that she requires for the pursuing of her divine mission across the changeable ocean of human affairs. And, far from wishing to transform her essential constitution, she has not the power even to relinquish the conditions of true liberty and sovereign independence with which Providence has endowed her in the general interest of souls... But, in regard to purely human societies, it is an oft-repeated historical fact that time, that great transformer of all things here below, operates great changes in their political institutions. On some occasions it limits itself to modifying something in the form of the established government; or, again, it will go so far as to substitute other forms for the primitive ones--forms totally different, even as regards the mode of transmitting sovereign power.

18. And how are these political changes of which We speak produced? They sometimes follow in the wake of violent crises, too often of a bloody character, in the midst of which preexisting governments totally disappear; then anarchy holds sway, and soon public order is shaken to its very foundations and finally overthrown. From that time onward a social need obtrudes itself upon the nation; it must provide for itself without delay. Is it not its privilege--or, better still, its duty--to defend itself against a state of affairs troubling it so deeply, and to re-establish public peace in the tranquillity of order? Now, this social need justifies the creation and the existence of new governments, whatever form they take; since, in the hypothesis wherein we reason, these new governments are a requisite to public order, all public order being impossible without a government. Thence it follows that, in similar junctures, all the novelty is limited to the political form of civil power, or to its mode of transmission; it in no wise affects the power considered in itself. This continues to be immutable and worthy of respect, as, considered in its

nature, it is constituted to provide for the common good, the supreme end which gives human society its origin. To put it otherwise, in all hypotheses, civil power, considered as such, is from God, always from God: "For there is no power but from God."[9]

19. Consequently, when new governments representing this immutable power are constituted, their acceptance is not only permissible but even obligatory, being imposed by the need of the social good which has made and which upholds them. This is all the more imperative because an insurrection stirs up hatred among citizens, provokes civil war, and may throw a nation into chaos and anarchy, and this great duty of respect and dependence will endure as long as the exigencies of the common good shall demand it, since this good is, after God, the first and last law in society.

20. Thus the wisdom of the Church explains itself in the maintenance of her relations with the numerous governments which have succeeded one another in France in less than a century, each change causing violent shocks. Such a line of conduct would be the surest and most salutary for all Frenchmen in their civil relations with the republic, which is the actual government of their nation. Far be it from them to encourage the political dissensions which divide them; all their efforts should be combined to preserve and elevate the moral greatness of their native land.

21. But a difficulty presents itself. "This Republic," it is said, "is animated by such anti-Christian sentiments that honest men, Catholics particularly, could not conscientiously accept it." This, more than anything else, has given rise to dissensions, and in fact aggravated them.... These regrettable differences would have been avoided if the very considerable distinction between constituted power and legislation had been carefully kept in view. In so much does legislation differ from political power and its form, that under a system of government most excellent in form legislation could be detestable; while quite the opposite under a regime most imperfect in form, might be found excellent legislation. It were an easy task to prove this truth, history in hand, but what would be the use? All are convinced of it. And who, better than the Church, is in position to know it--she who has striven to maintain habitual relations with all political governments? Assuredly she, better than any other power, could tell the consolation or sorrow occasioned her by the laws of the various governments by which nations have been ruled from the Roman Empire down to the present.

22. If the distinction just established has its major importance, it is likewise manifestly reasonable: Legislation is the work of men invested with power, and who, in fact, govern the nation; therefore it follows that, practically, the quality of the laws depends more upon the quality of these men than upon the power. The laws will be good or bad accordingly as the minds of the legislators are imbued with good or bad principles, and as they allow themselves to be guided by political prudence or by passion.

23. That several years ago different important acts of legislation in France proceeded from a tendency hostile to religion, and therefore to the interests of the nation, is admitted by all, and unfortunately confirmed by the evidence of facts. We Ourselves, in obedience to a sacred duty, made earnest appeals to him who was then at the head of the republic, but these tendencies continued to exist; the evil grew, and it was not surprising that the members of the French Episcopate chosen by the Holy Ghost to rule

over their respective illustrious churches should even quite recently have considered it an obligation publicly to express their grief concerning the condition of affairs in France in regard to the Catholic religion. Poor France! God alone can measure the abyss of evil into which she will sink if this legislation, instead of improving, will stubbornly continue in a course which must end in plucking from the minds and hearts of Frenchmen the religion which has made them so great.

24. And here is precisely the ground on which, political dissensions aside, upright men should unite as one to combat, by all lawful and honest means, these progressive abuses of legislation. The respect due to constituted power cannot prohibit this: unlimited respect and obedience cannot be yielded to all legislative measures, of no matter what kind, enacted by this same power. Let it not be forgotten that law is a precept ordained according to reason and promulgated for the good of the community by those who, for this end, have been entrusted with power. . . Accordingly, such points in legislation as are hostile to religion and to God should never be approved; to the contrary, it is a duty to disapprove them. It was this that St. Augustine, the great Bishop of Hippo, brought out so strongly in his eloquent reasoning: "Sometimes the powerful ones of earth are good and fear God; at other times they fear Him not. Julian was an emperor unfaithful to God, an apostate, a pervert, an idolator. Christian soldiers served this faithless emperor, but as soon as there was question of the cause of Jesus Christ they recognized only Him who was in heaven. Julian commanded them to honor idols and offer them incense, but they put God above the prince. However, when he made them form into ranks and march against a hostile nation, they obeyed instantly. They distinguished the eternal from the temporal master and still in view of the eternal Master they submitted to such a temporal master."[10]

25. We know that, by a lamentable abuse of his reason, and still more so of his will, the atheist denies these principles. But, in a word, atheism is so monstrous an error that it could never, be it said to the honor of humanity, annihilate in it the consciousness of God's claims and substitute them with idolatry of the State.

26. The principles which should regulate our conduct towards God and towards human governments being thus defined, no unprejudiced man can censure French Catholics if, sparing themselves neither fatigue nor sacrifice, they labor to preserve a condition essential to their country's salvation, one which embodies so many glorious traditions registered by history, and which every Frenchmen is in duty bound not to forget.

27. Before closing Our Letter, We wish to touch upon two points bearing an affinity to each other and which, because so closely connected with religious interests, have stirred up some division among Catholics--One of them is the Concordat, which for so many years has facilitated in France the harmony between the government of the Church and that of the State. On the observance of this solemn, bi-lateral compact, always faithfully kept by the Holy See, the enemies of the Catholic religion do not themselves agree-The more violent among them desire its abolition, that the State may be entirely free to molest the Church of Jesus Christ--On the contrary, others, being more astute, wish, or rather claim to wish, the preservation of the Concordat: not because they agree that the State should fulfill toward the Church the subscribed engagements, but solely that the State may be benefited by the concessions made by the Church; as if one could, at

will, separate engagements entered into from concessions obtained, when both of these things form a substantial part of one whole. For them the Concordat would amount to no more than a chain forged to fetter the liberty of the Church, that holy liberty to which she has a divine and inalienable right. Of these two opinions which will prevail? We know not. We desired to recall them only to recommend Catholics not to provoke a secession by interfering in a matter with which it is the business of the Holy See to deal.

28. We shall not hold to the same language on another point, concerning the principle of the separation of the State and Church, which is equivalent to the separation of human legislation from Christian and divine legislation. We do not care to interrupt Ourselves here in order to demonstrate the absurdity of such a separation; each one will understand for himself. As soon as the State refuses to give to God what belongs to God, by a necessary consequence it refuses to give to citizens that to which, as men, they have a right; as, whether agreeable or not to accept, it cannot be denied that man's rights spring from his duty toward God. Whence if follows that the State, by missing in this connection the principal object of its institution, finally becomes false to itself by denying that which is the reason of its own existence. These superior truths are so clearly proclaimed by the voice of even natural reason, that they force themselves upon all who are not blinded by the violence of passion; therefore Catholics cannot be too careful in defending themselves against such a separation. In fact, to wish that the State would separate itself from the Church would be to wish, by a logical sequence, that the Church be reduced to the liberty of living according to the law common to all citizens....It is true that in certain countries this state of affairs exists. It is a condition which, if it have numerous and serious inconveniences, also offers some advantages--above all when, by a fortunate inconsistency, the legislator is inspired by Christian principles--and, though these advantages cannot justify the false principle of separation nor authorize its defense, they nevertheless render worthy of toleration a situation which, practically, might be worse.

29. But in France, a nation Catholic in her traditions and by the present faith of the great majority of her sons, the Church should not be placed in the precarious position to which she must submit among other peoples; and the better that Catholics understand the aim of the enemies who desire this separation, the less will they favor it. To these enemies, and they say it clearly enough, this separation means that political legislation be entirely independent of religious legislation; nay, more, that Power be absolutely indifferent to the interests of Christian society, that is to say, of the Church; in fact, that it deny her very existence. But they make a reservation formulated thus: As soon as the Church, utilizing the resources which common law accords to the least among Frenchmen, will, by redoubling her native activity, cause her work to prosper, then the State intervening, can and will put French Catholics outside the common law itself. . . In a word: the ideal of these men would be a return to paganism: the State would recognize the Church only when it would be pleased to persecute her.

30. We have explained, Venerable Brethren, in an abridged though clear way, some if not all the points upon which French Catholics and all intelligent men should be at peace and unity, so as to remedy, in so far as still remains possible, the evils with which France is afflicted, and to elevate

its moral greatness. The points in question are: Religion and country, political power and legislation, the conduct to be observed in regard to this power and legislation, the Concordat, the separation of Church and State....We cherish the hope and the confidence that the elucidation of these points will dissipate the prejudices of many honest, well-meaning men, facilitate the pacification of minds, and thereby cement the union of all Catholics for the sustaining of the great cause of Christ, who loves the Franks.

31. How consoling to Our heart to encourage you all in this way and to behold you all responding with docility to Our appeal! You, Venerable Brethren, by your authority and with the enlightened zeal for Church and Fatherland which so distinguishes you, will give able support to this peace-making work. We delight in the hope that those who are in power will appreciate Our words, which aim at the happiness and prosperity of France.

32. Meanwhile, as a pledge of Our paternal affection, we bestow upon you, Venerable Brethren, upon your clergy and also upon all the Catholics of France, the apostolic blessing.

Given at Rome, the 16th day of February, 1892, in the fourteenth year of Our Pontificate.

ENDNOTES:

1. Lk 23.2.

2. Jn 19. 12-15.

3. Dialog. cum Tryphone.

4. Tertull. In Apolog.; Minutius Felix, In Octavio.

5. Jn 16.33.

6. I Pt 2.17.

7. I Tm 2.1-3.

8. Heb 13.8.

9. Rom. 13.1. 10. Enarrat, in Psalm. CXXIV, n. 7, fin.